

Victorian school teachers to share Solomon Islands experience in Rome

Two teachers from Victoria who met in a remote Solomon Islands school through Australian Catholic University's unique immersion program will share their experiences at a global conference in Rome next week.

Primary school teachers Eilish Flagg and Katie Rawet, both from Victoria, Australia, should have crossed paths as education students at ACU but instead met in a remote village with no electricity, running water, or roads. The then third-year university students were completing ACU's Solomon Islands Teacher Education Immersion program, which offers education students a chance to teach in a remote school in Solomon Islands.

Ms Flagg and Ms Rawet have been invited to share their experiences at the Uniservitate III Global Symposium in Rome next week, where Pope Francis is expected to meet and bless the delegates on October 26.

Ms Rawet, a prep teacher at St John Bosco's Primary School, Niddrie, said the Solomon Islands immersion program prepared her to be a better teacher in Australia.

"We lived within the villages and the communities, and we had no running water, no electricity, no cars, no roads," Katie, a prep teacher at, said.

"It's changed me as a person in terms what I value, where I put my energy and my time, and how I react to different situations. It was a bit of a reality check.

"I've been lucky enough to teach overseas twice before, once in Cambodia through ACU as well, and the one piece of advice that I give pre-service teachers...is to push yourself out of your comfort zone because that's where you learn best."

For Ms Flagg, who works at St Mary's Catholic Primary School in Warracknabeal, the program taught her the importance of gratitude in the classroom.

"The school also had very, very little resources and yet the students were so grateful for whatever learning experience they had," she said.

"I use that a lot as a teacher now, where I try to tell the children in my class that we don't need the biggest and best things to achieve the same goal."

ACU and its Rome campus are official collaborators in the III Global Symposium, which will bring together leaders, educators, and students from around the world to promote service-learning within Catholic higher education institutions.

ACU Ballarat Associate Professor Mellita Jones, one of the leaders of the Solomon Islands immersion program, said more than 200 students have gone through the program since its inception in 2009. Dr Jones is now preparing to lead a group of 20 students to Solomon Islands for the 2022 immersion program.

The ACU Solomon Islands Teacher Education Immersion program was named joint winner of the 2022 Uniservitate Award (Asia and Oceania Hub) in September.

Regarding the upcoming Symposium, Dr Matthew Pink, Associate Director, ACU Engagement said: "The symposium is a great opportunity to connect with and learn from service-learning practitioners in Catholic Higher Education and a marvellous activation of our Rome campus through networking events, meetings, and providing accommodation for an international group of delegates."

Eilish Flagg, Katie Rawet and Dr Matthew Pink are available for virtual interviews while in Rome from October 22 or upon return to Australia.

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